

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Amend the claims as follows.

Claims 1-11. (Canceled)

12. (New) An isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof comprising at least one Cys amino acid which is reversibly protected.

13. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 wherein said Cys amino acid is reversibly protected by chemical and/or enzymatic means.

14. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 wherein said Cys amino acid is reversibly protected by sulfonation.

15. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein according to claim 12 which is chosen from the group consisting of E1s or E1p.

16. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 wherein the reversible protection of the Cys amino acid is removed.

17. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 or 16 for use as a medicament.

18. (New) A composition comprising an isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 or 16 and at least one of a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, adjuvant or excipient.

19. (New) The composition according to claim 18 which is an HCV vaccine composition.

20. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or a part thereof according to claim 12 or 16 for raising antibodies that specifically recognise said HCV envelope protein or part thereof.

21. (New) An immunoassay for detecting HCV antibody in a biological sample, said immunoassay comprising the steps of:

- incubating said biological sample with an isolated HCV protein or part thereof according to claim 12 or 16 under conditions that allow formation of a HCV antibody-HCV protein complex; and
- determining whether said HCV antibody-HCV protein complex is formed.

22. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 16 which is obtained by a purification procedure including the steps of:

- (i) purifying said HCV envelope protein or part thereof in which the Cys amino acid is reversibly protected by chemical and/or enzymatic means,
- (ii) removal of the reversible protection state of the Cys amino acid in the HCV envelope protein or part thereof obtained in (i),
- (iii) obtaining a HCV envelope protein or part thereof in which the cysteines are deprotected.

23. (New) The isolated HCV envelope protein or part thereof according to claim 12 which is obtained by a purification procedure including the step of purifying said HCV envelope protein or part thereof in which the Cys amino acid is reversibly protected by chemical and/or enzymatic means.